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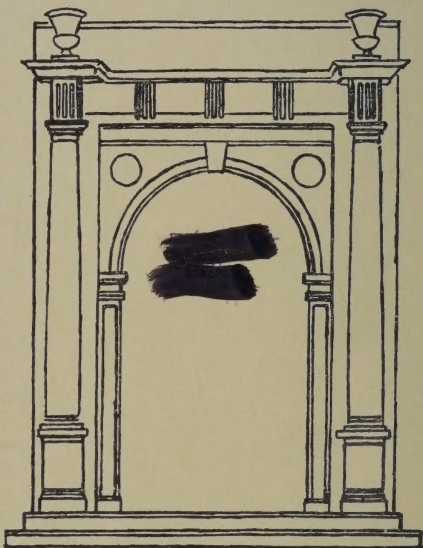


Japanese Art

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JAPANESE ART

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JAPANESE ART

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BY

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Under the Tokugawa Shoguns Japan at last achieved peace and material prosperity, but the new aristocracy thrown up by a series of political and social upheavals, which henceforward held the wealth and power, had not in its too rapid rise had time to acquire the solid traditional virtues of other days.

The samurais themselves, deprived of their former social standing by the peace, no longer knew what to do with their two swords. Most of them had become *ronins* (samurais without a master) and now that their sense of honour and their scorn of death found their only outlet in duels and vendettas, these admirable qualities had become inopportune and the Shoguns tried to modify them.

The Zen spirit, now that it could no longer be tested in battle, had taken refuge in the monasteries. It had abandoned the painters studio and was hardly active anywhere, apart from the *No* theatre, except in the tea ceremony and the art of flower arrangement. Like the *Sumi-e* landscapt painting (see volume III) these two "doctrines" had it as their object

to lead the soul, by means of the search for an external perfection, to participate intuitively in the mystery of things and through that in the secret of being. The spirit of Zen has still kept its vitality down to our own day, and these ceremonies have had great importance in forming the aesthetic conventions and the refinement of Japanese taste. Moreover, they gave a happy stimulus to ceramic art encouraging potters to produce works of ever greater perfection.

As for painting, in spite of the efforts of Tanyu, of Sotatsu and Korin (see volume III), and then of Maruyama Okyo and some others, it grew bloodless in a too-rarefied atmosphere. Japan, in fact, from that time on had to live and autumn entertainments "joyful parties Shoguns, the better to assure their all embracing despotism, had forbidden all communication with the continent under very heavy penalties.

The painters sought their inspiration—just as the handscroll painters had done (see volume II)—in the scenes of daily life that unrolled before their eyes. But instead of the refinements of the old life of the court and the vicissitudes of war, the society of that age scarcely offered more than "spring and autumn entertainments" joyful parties of merrymakers, geisha dances, and courtesans peacocking in the full feathers of their vanity.

Immediate decadence threatened the new school—the *Ukiyo-ye* or painting of the passing world, of the actual world. Despite wonderful qualities of style and colour, this



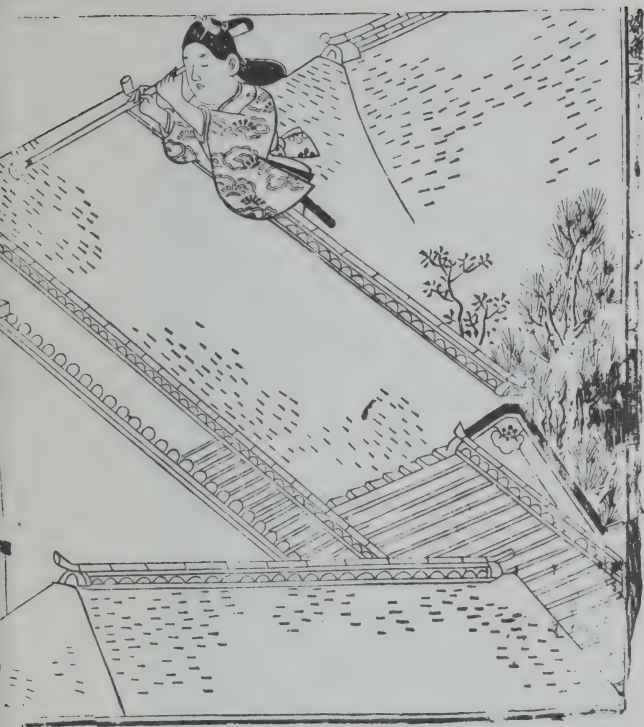
TORII KIYOMASU. THE ACTOR DANJURO.



ISHIKAWA MORONOBU.

school was in danger of descending into mean vulgarity, and that all the faster since it was working for the wealthy classes among whom corruption of taste had followed on corruption of manners.

But when the Ukiyo-ye school, having



WOMAN SURPRISED IN BATH.

dared, to the great scandal of the last adherents of the Kano, to abandon the high traditions of painting inherited from China, had gone so far as to publish stamped prints which were not even the direct work of the artist, something of a miracle happened.

This art which was aimed at humble people by means of cheap works, printed in great numbers and available to all, suddenly found new vitality in this direct contact with the people. For the Japanese people—the most artistic and refined in the world—had, amid the general corruption, kept their perfectly healthy, fresh and sturdy tastes. And this fresh taste together with their joyous love of life inspired the prints.

Already under the Tokugawa the *hai-kai* had developed as a simpler poetic form than the ancient *tanka* of 31 syllables: in it 17 syllables arranged in three lines had to produce either a profound impression or simply a wonderfully subtlone: .

*Dead, the branch;
Poised, the crow;
Autumn evening.*

(Basho).

In the same way the little print that now decorated even the humblest dwelling, was a last flowering of Japanese painting to satisfy the deep needs of the common people: their love of nature and of beauty simple and true, their cult of the past, of the heroes of history and of legend, and also their passion for celebrated actors and the great courtesans arrayed like the princesses of former times.

At first the prints were done in black from cherry wood blocks. The artist made his drawing on transparent paper which the engraver glued down in reverse, and then cut away the wood so that the lines stood out in

relief. Soon colour was added to the blocks, and then the proofs so obtained were hand painted.

The first Ukiyo-ye prints, which used the technique earliest employed for images of Buddhist piety and later for printed books, are due to Ishikawa Moronobu (1625-1694) a distant disciple of Matabei. For the most part they show scenes in which women, rather squat and still clumsy in style (plate in black and white II) already take first place.

Torii Kiyonobu (1664-1729) is the founder of the Torii school, which soon came to specialise in prints of actors and posters for the Kabuki theatre, the new popular theatre, which revived the memories of all the great deeds of old Japan in dramas lasting the whole day through which the public—the same public who bought the prints—followed enthusiastically. Kiyonobu (plate I) and his brother Torii Kiyomasu (plate in black and white I) also published, as did the Kwaigetsudo, many prints of *bijins* (pretty girls) drawn in great decorative lines whose up strokes and down strokes suggested modelling.

Okumura Masanobu (1685-1764) also portrays *bijins* of great nobility whose long kimonos emphasise their grace (pl. in black and white III).

He was one of the first, if not the first, to use printing in three colours (*beni-e*) in which pink and green were added to the black (see pl. 2).

Suzuki Harunobu (1725?-1770) is believed to have been the inventor of the polychrome

print (up to seven or eight colours). He created a slender delicate feminine type, sometimes a little mannered; and it is in his prints (pl. 3 and 4) that the decor of interiors, verandahs and landscapes first appears. His friend and disciple Koriusai, who worked between 1764 and 1780, began by imitating his manner. After that, he made some lovely blocks of animals (pl. 5) and of courtesans out for a walk.

The works of Kiyonaga (1752-1815) are full of nobility, strength and elegance. His harmonious colours are sustained by beautiful



OKUMURA MASANOBU. LOVE SCENE.

deep blacks. He is the great classical master of the print (pl. 6).

Katsukawa Shunsho (1726-1792) and Sharaku, who worked about 1795 are excellent painters of actors. Both of them sought intensity of expression, the first by deliberately angular lines and emphatic grimaces (pl. 7) the second, a marvellous colourist, with more sobriety and depth (pl. 8).

Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806) is *par excellence* the painter of women, to whom he gives the most subtle elegance by exaggerating their slenderness, an elegance further emphasised by the exquisite taste of his colours and the suppleness of his drawing (pl. 9 and 10). Yeishi (1751-1829) is also a very distinguished painter of women (pl. 11).

The colour prints domain was enlarged by Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849) who drew everything that can be drawn; men, women, animals, plants, landscapes, warriors, monsters and ghosts; and at the end of his never-wearying life he signed himself "the old man mad on drawing" (pl. 12 and 14).

Finally Hiroshige (1797-1858) is a great landscape painter with a wonderful feeling for nature and the poetry of the land of Japan (pl. 13 and 15). "Clear sky with a storm at Awasa... Snow on the hill of Asaka in the evening... Flight of wild geese descending on the bay of Takanawa...". The work of the last great engraver of Japan brings together once more all the qualities of an art which once had been more successful than any other in translating the highly

metaphysical doctrine of Buddha into images directly accessible to simple hearts, and which, ten centuries later, was still able to provide the common people of Japan with precious images in which they could once more explore all that was most beautiful in their race and land.

Ten years later the Meiji era began, and Japan opened her doors to all the influences of the West.

LIST OF PLATES

PLATES IN BLACK AND WHITE

- i. Torii Kiyomasu (beginning of the xviiith Century): *The actor Ishikawa Danjuro in the part of Wadonai.*
- ii. Ishikawa Moronobu (1625-1694): *Woman surprised in her bath.*
- iii. Okumura Masanobu (1685-1764): *Love scene.*

PLATES IN COLOUR

1. Torii Kiyonobu (1664-1729): *Love scene*.
2. Kiyohiro (middle of the xviii Century): *Collecting shells* (beni-e). Musee Guimet, Paris.
3. Suzuki Harunobu (1725?-1770): *Young woman in the rain*.
4. Suzuki Harunobu: *Bijin by a waterfall*. Musee Guimet, Paris.
5. Koriusai (second half of the xviii Century): *White herons in the rushes*. Musee Guimet, Paris.
6. Kiyonaga (1752-1815): *After the bath*.
7. Katsukawa Sunsho (1726-1792): *The actor Danjuro V in the part of a feudal lord*.
8. Sharaku (end of the xviii Century): *The actor Yuso in the part of the ronin Kampei*.
9. Kitagawa Utamaro (1753-1806): *Women fishing for awabi*.
10. Kitagawa Utamaro: *Yamauba, the lady of the mountain, with Kintoki, the infant Hercules, on her back*. Musee Guimet, Paris.
11. Yeishi (1751-1829): *Women in the country*.
12. Katsushika Hokusai (1760-1849): *Wave*.
13. Hiroshige (1797-1858): *Downpour at Shono* (from the series of 53 *Views of Tokaido*).
14. Hokusai: *Cranes*. Musee Guimet, Paris.
15. Hiroshige: *The Kindaïkyo, a bridge across the Nishigawa*.



春白
 世良乃此やいり
 河下ふ
 鳥居清廣筆









圖
附
第
一
冊

清
長
五



勝春彦一画









風流七折あひ





東坡通
山以次
月
庄野



廣重







諸國名所百景

因形
名國
錦平橋



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